

THE RUINS in the centre OF SOFIA



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A Guide-book

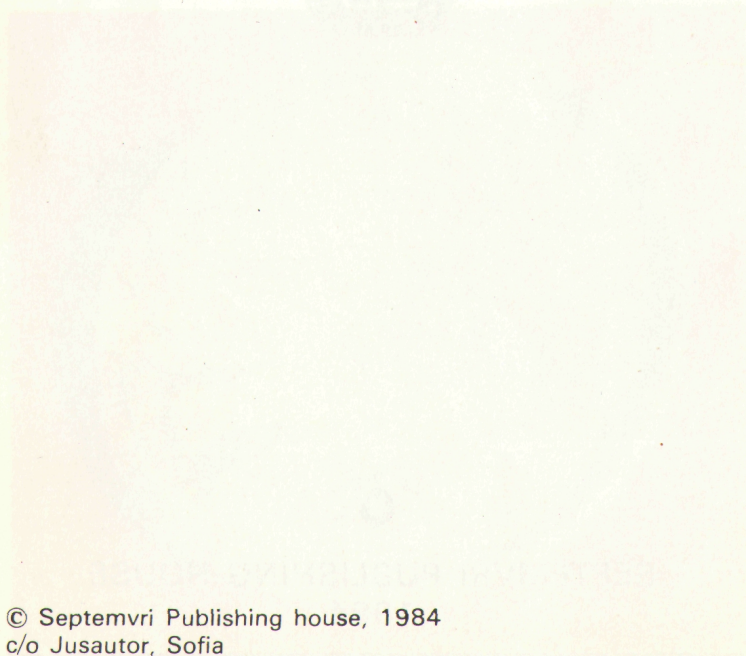


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Large Decree with Agate of Sofia 18th century 100

Small Decree 18th century 100



Sofia, the capital of the Peoples Republic of Bulgaria is one of the oldest cities in Europe. The motto on Sofia's coat of arms „Ever growing, never aging“ expresses most aptly the essential features of this city which strikes the visitor with its youth and vitality. Few monuments have come down to us from the millenia of the history.

The history of Sofia begins in the remote past, more than 7000 years ago when a settlement arose in the centre of the fertile plain around the warm mineral spring in the foothills of the Vitosha mountain, the banks of deep rivers and amidst the century old forests abounding in game. One epoch followed another, the population changed ethnically; however, whatever the historical vicissitudes of fortune the city remained on the same site. A considerable neolithic settlement dating from the 5 millenium was discovered in the Geo Milev quarter in Sofia. Traces of the most ancient settlement from the Aeneolithic period, were unearthed in the very centre of the city, in 9th of September Square. The Thracians inhabited the Sofia Plain during the 2 millenium, as well as the remaining Bulgarian lands. The tribes inhabiting the Sofia Plain as late as the 1st century B.C. were known as the Serdi. There are grounds to consider that the Thracian settlement excavated under the Balkan Hotel and the Central Department Store at a depth 10 m, became a town in Hellenistic days.

The Roman conquest of the Balkan Peninsula put an end to the independence of the Thracian tribes. The freedom-loving and warlike Thracians resisted the invasion, however eventually the Sofia Plain was included in the confines of the empire as late as the

Female cult Figurines — 7000 B.C. Neolithic Age (found at the Geo Milev Quarter)



1st century A.D. The Roman province of Thracia was divided into strategions, military, and administrative districts. Serdica, one of them was the principal town of the Serdi; thus the town of Serdica became the Roman seat of government and retained that position throughout Roman days. The emperor Marcus Ulpian Trajan (98-117) raised the town to the status of a municipium, a town enjoying autonomy in its administration. In his honour the town of Serdica adopted the name Ulpia Serdica, while inscriptions refer to it as the „most brilliant town of the Serdi“.

Serdica became a rich flourishing town with a water supply system, public buildings and was connected by roads with the different regions of the peninsula. The principal road linking central Europe and Asia passed through it. A mighty wall was built during the 2nd century A.D., during the joint reign of the emperors Marcus Aurelius and Commodus. Serdica had four principal gates; a network of streets divided the town into „insulae“ (quarters) where principally public buildings stood. Lenin Square, the very heart of present day Sofia, is also its historical centre. There probably is no other city in Europe whose center has never moved over such a long period of its development. The Forum of ancient Serdica had a rectangular shape and was lined with ornamented porticoes. The most important administrative buildings, the Praetorium (the Headquarters of the Roman Governor) and the Bouleutherion (the Ancient Municipal Council of Serdica) were unearthed in the South-west and North west part of Lenin Square respectively. The Thermae, the Public Baths of Serdica were situated around the present day mineral baths.

Gold Bowl from Sofia, 8th century B.C.



The increased economic importance of the city was expressed in the decision to establish an autonomous mint in Serdica. The first coins to be struck were those of the emperor Marcus Aurelius (161-180) with images of famous buildings, the major monuments of the city and its deities. During the 3rd century A.D. when Serdica became the capital of the province of Dacia Inferior when a regular mint was established.

Temples and shrines dedicated to a number of deities were built in Serdica. Statues of Gods, in particular to Asclepius, Hygeia, Apollo latros, adorned the forum, the temples and public buildings, while the local Thracian inhabitants continued to venerate their own deity — the Heros — the Thracian Horseman, appearing on many votive tablets.

Serdica flourished especially under Constantine the Great (303-377), who frequently visited it and even intended to make the town the capital of the Eastern Roman Empire. Many of his Decrees were issued in Serdica, which owing to the frequent visits of the emperor, was embellished with beautiful buildings, including an imperial residence. The rotunda of St George — the oldest building in Sofia — is a structure some 1600 years old. Ammianus Marcellinus during the mid 4th century A.D. mentions Sofia as a „brilliant and noble town“. After the adoption of Christianity Serdica rose to prominence as one of the centres of early Christianity, the famous Council of Serdica being held here in 343 A.D. This period also saw the building of churches, the most important among them being the basilica of St Sophia, a silent witness of the eventful history of the town. Its silhouette was so

Relief depicting a Theatrical Performance and Circus Performance
— 4th century



closely linked with the Bulgarian capital that in the course of time the city adopted the basilica's name. It is not by chance, that the image of the basilica occupies one of the fields of the coat of arms of Sofia.

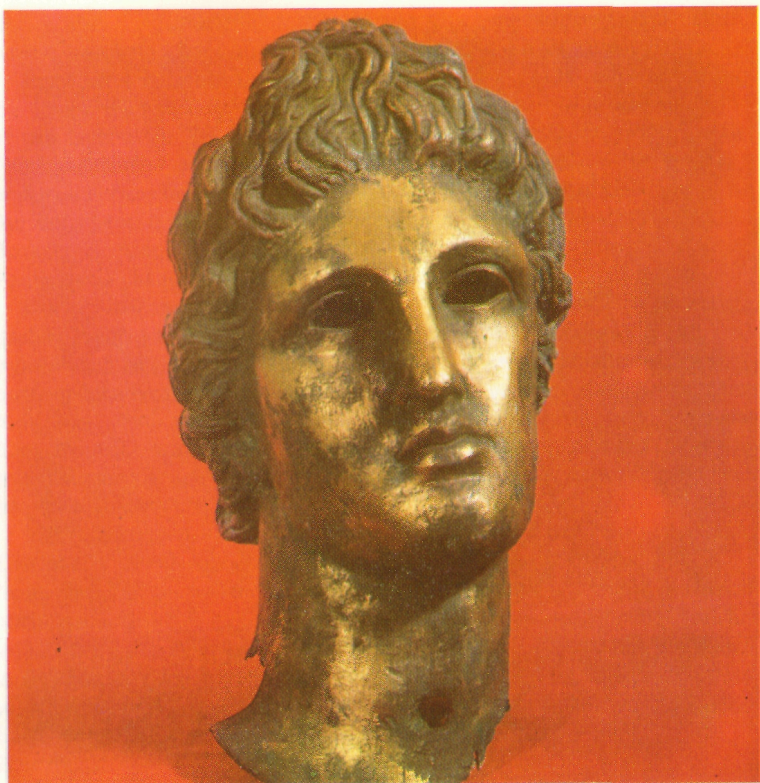
Invasions by Goths, Visigoths, Sarmatians, Huns became frequent as far back as the 3rd century. Flourishing Serdica, situated at an important crossroads became their target on more than one occasion. The municipality made an attempt to build a wall around a large area to the North and West of the city wall where the inhabitants from the vicinity of Serdica could seek refuge in case of danger.

The final period when the ancient city flourished was during Justinian's reign. The fortified Danubian border failed to check the Slav tribes which settled permanently on the Balkan peninsula. Serdica remained in the confines of the Byzantine empire for a considerable period after the formation of the First Bulgarian State (681). The year 809 was eventful for the town for it was then that khan Kroum, the commander of the Bulgarian army besieged the fortified town and forced the Byzantines to surrender. The town was given the Slavonic name Sredets, which suits its position — situated as it is in the centre of the Balkan peninsula an important crossroads between the East and the West.

In the course of two centuries Sredets developed as an important political, military, strategical and cultural centre of the Bulgarian state, mentioned by many Medieval chroniclers and called by the Byzantines Triaditsa. After the fall of Preslav and the conquest of the Eastern Bulgarian lands by the Byzantine Empire

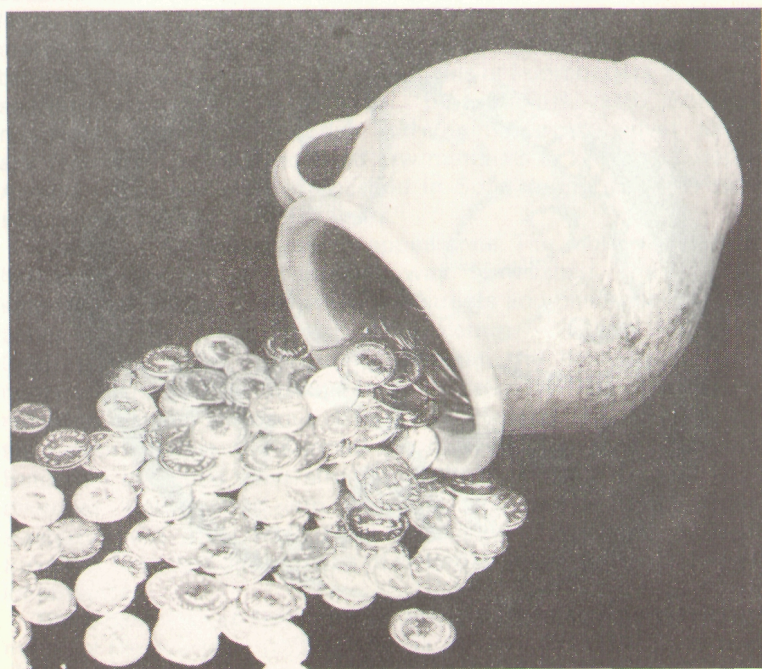
A Coin struck in Serdica, with the Deity Protector of the City — , 3rd century A.D.





Head of Apollo, gilt bronze, — 2nd century A.D.

Coin Hoard from Sofia — 2d-3rd centuries A.D.





Gold Decoration with Agates, Serdica, 5th century A.D.

Bowl, sgraffito, 13th-14th century



(972), the Bulgarian Patriarch Damian moved his seat to Sredets, which became the capital of Bulgaria for a short time.

Byzantine rule continued for over a century and half, however, the town did not lose its significance. For some time it was the seat of the Byzantine governor, who had the title of Duke of Bulgaria. The inhabitants of Sredets made many attempts to rid themselves of foreign bondage. The Byzantine author Keukamenos speaks of the courageous defence of the Boyana fortress, led by the viovode Botko. Sredets suffered terrible invasions at the hands of Pechenegs, Magyars, Serbians, crusaders etc.

During the second Bulgarian State Sredets became a major trading centre and won prominence as a seat of learning. Sofia had workshops of goldsmiths and workshops for the production of fine pottery tableware as well as workshops for tanners, weavers, iron mongers and armourers. Merchants from Venice and Ragusa (Doudrovnik) traded the town. In the monasteries near Sredets monks translated, copied and preserved many manuscripts; and painters decorated the walls of churches.

Little is known of the appearance of the town during that period. The walls were repaired and maintained. Many of the buildings from antiquity were converted to serve new purposes and numerous small churches were built. The Boyana Church, erected in 1259 by the ruler of the Sredets District, Sebastocrator Kaloyan, is the finest gem of Bulgarian architecture of the period. Sredets was known far and wide and it is not by chance that Patriarch Euthymius refers to it as „one of the great and famous towns in Europe. . .

Sredets was called Sofia towards the end of the 14th century. The name is mentioned for the first time in the Tsar Ivan Shishman's Goldsealed Charter, given to the Dragalevtsi Monastery.

Sofia resisted the Ottoman invasion quite a long time and was captured only after a siege lasting three months. After its fall it became seat of the Chief Governor (Beylerbey) of Rumelia and his large administration. The enormous Ottoman empire became a market for the high quality goods of Bulgarian artisans, who belonged to over 60 guilds: the guilds of ironmongers, tanners, saddle-makers, tailors, potters, pipe-makers, etc. Foreign merchants imported Florentine and Venetian cloth, velvet, silver and faience dishes and exported raw materials to Western Europe. A mint (zarbhana) was established in Sofia during the 16th century, which existed for 200 years.

Gradually Sofia changed its appearance. The solid wall which had defended it from invasions, was demolished. The straight streets gave way to narrow winding streets and blind alleys. Large public buildings were erected in the centre — Cahagi Aski Han (Inn), Buyük Han, the open air market, the caravanserai and numerous Islamic establishments for religious instruction. The minarets of many a mosque, Banya basi Mosque, Buyük Mosque, the Celebi Mosque, the Kermitle Mosque rose high over the town. Bulgarian churches were small, modest in appearance. The best churches were turned into mosques. The church of St Petka Samardzhiiska and . . . St Spas date from this period. Foreign travellers have left descriptions of Ottoman Sofia and the life of its inhabitants.

The inhabitants of Sofia took an active part in the popular movement for the liberation of Bulgaria. On January 4th 1878 Sofia was liberated through the heroic campaign of the Russian army. Several

months later, on April 3rd 1879 the First Constitutive National Assembly in Turnovo chose Sofia as the capital of Bulgaria.

Few towns have shown such vitality and vigour as Sofia. The town has seen both decline and centuries of foreign rule, but has never lost its economic importance and its role as seat of learning.

Today Sofia treasures the traces of its century old history and draws an inspiration from its past in forming its new appearance. The ancient buildings in the centre have been declared an archeological reserve, the new buildings preserve in their underground chambers the remains of the town's cultural heritage. Sofia is an original synthesis between the new and the old and with its centre is an example of the succesful merging of archaeological monuments and contemporary buildings. Visitors to our city are strongly impressed by the capital of Socialist Bulgaria, not only because of its beauty and attractiveness, but because of its rich heritage and above all, its vitality — the vitality of an ancient town with prospects of a bright future.



Pitcher, Florentine majolica, 16th-17th century

I. REMAINS OF THE CITY WALL



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1. The Eastern Gateway
 2. The Round Tower
 3. The Triangular Tower
 4. The Western Gateway
 5. Ensemble of Ancient Sites under the Bulgarian Foreign Trade Bank
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 7. Remnants of the City Residence
 8. The Main Street of Sofia
 9. An Ancient Public Building
 10. Baths from Late Antiquity
 11. The Church St.Petka Samardziska
 12. The Banya Basi Mosque
 13. The Buyük Mosque
 14. The Basilica St.Sophia
 15. The Arched Medieval Building

Serdica Street

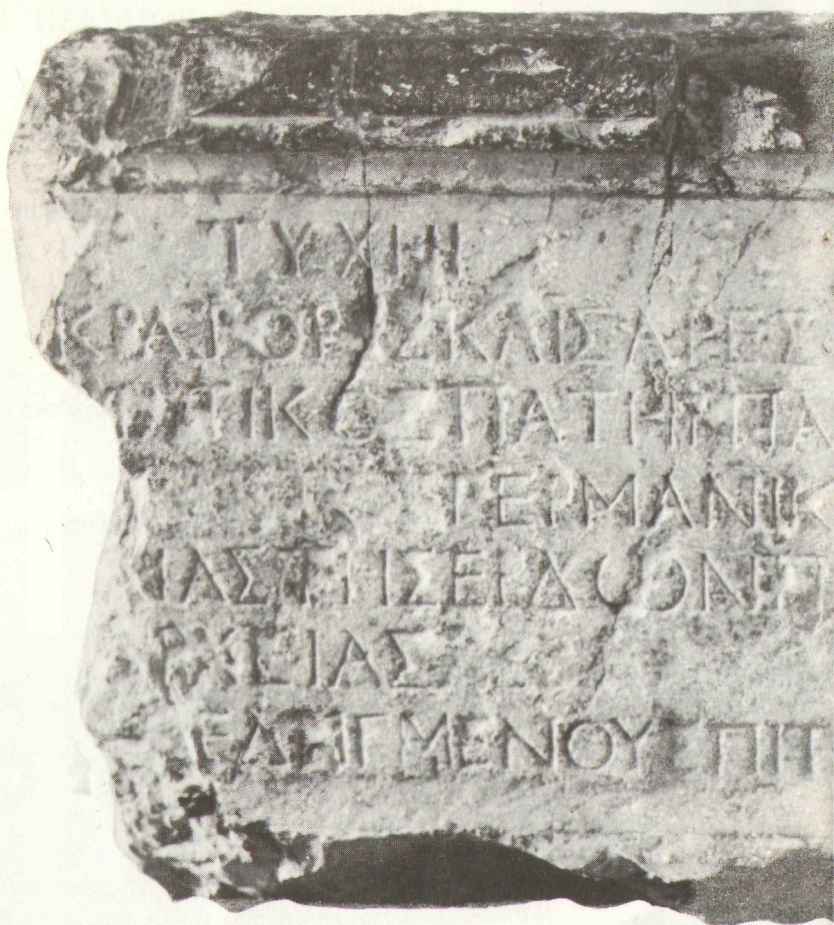
Boul. Dondoukov

Boul. Rouski

Boul Stamboliiski

Legue Street

0 50 100 m



The Inscriptions on the Building
of the City Wall, 2d century A.D



„Good Luck! The greatest and devine Emperors Caesar Marcus Aurelius Antoninus Augustus, he who vanquished the Sarmatians, the Germans, Father of the Fatherland, High Priest and Lucius Aurelius Commodus Augustus, he who vanquished the Sarmatians, the Germans, gave the legions city walls in the town of the Serdi, at the time when Auselianus Aemilianus was Governor.“

Serdica is the only city in the Roman empire where two identical inscriptions for the building of the city wall have been found. These solemn inscriptions in Greek, cut in large stone blocks built in above the main gates were seen by everyone who passed them. They establish the date of the construction of the wall — between 176 and 180 A.D. The first inscription was unearthed in 1957 close to the northern gateway (where Blvd. Georgi Dimitrov and Exarch Josif Street intersect) and the other one in 1974 in the course of excavations of the western gateway (the present day George Washington Street, behind the Yavor Furniture Shop). One of them is exhibited in the underpass before the Party House.

Rebuilt, repaired and reinforced, the city wall defended the city in the course of 20 centuries up to its fall to the Ottomans. The first wall was made of bricks, with a width of 2 m, and its foundation consisted of stone blocks. The city wall of Serdica underwent two principal construction periods. For unknown reasons the wall was entirely demolished and a new wall, 10-12 m high and 2.5 m wide was erected towards the end of the 3rd century or the beginning of the 4th. It was made of successive layers of stone and brick. Round towers were built along it at regular intervals. Close to the towers and the gateways steps were erected along the wall, thus adding to its thickness. Towards the 5th or the early 6th century the wall was further strengthened by the addition of a 1.80 m wide brick band. New triangular and pentagonal towers were also added, making the wall absolutely inaccessible to the more advanced siege methods. The gateways were rebuilt. The external gate was covered with iron bands, and a portcullis, hoisted up and let down with pulleys.

The first rebuilding after the fall of Serdica to the Bulgarians appears to have been made after the reign of khan Kroum, the gateways were reinforced once more and some of the posterns at the towers were walled in. The walls and fortifications of Serdica proved their strength during the long wars with Byzantium (towards the end of the 10th century and the early 11th century). Towards the 13th century the gateways were replaced with new ones with iron bound gates, attached to revolving bars were installed. The round towers were turned into square towers, similar to those in Turnovo, Vidin and Cherven.

The wall has been traced and established to a considerable degree: the area inclosed, 1800 square meters, has the shape of an irregular rectangle. The southern wall ran parallel to Alabain Street, the east wall — parallel to Legue Street and Serdica Street, the northern one, parallel to Exarch Josif Street, with a bend under the building of the Covered Market in Sofia and the Macedonian House of Culture. The western wall begins here, parallel to George Washington Street and Lavele Street. Within these limits the city coincides with the present day centre of the capital. Today the wall can be seen at five places.

One of the most interesting sites the main eastern gateway has been preserved in the underpass in front of the Party House, flanked by two pentagonal towers. The street leading to the forum, and part of the wall, following a North South direction can be seen. The eastern gateway and the towers defending it constitute a complex of fortifications dating from the time of Justinian (527-565). Regardless of repairs the general appearance of the gateway was preserved until the wall was demolished. The external gateway made of limestone blocks was a monumental structure. The grooves where the portcullis was drawn and dropped are still preserved. The structures and fortifications of khan Omourtag in Pliska, the first Bulgarian capital, are identical.

The Eastern Gateway



The inner gateway consists of three parts, the side gates, of one door each, and the middle gates of a double door. Posterns were left between the two gateways.

The northern gateway was rebuilt during the period of the Second Bulgarian State, using existing material. Wooden beams were placed where a difference of levels appears. Remains of an older wall, of opus mixtum (alternating layers of stone and brick) have been found at the bottom of both towers, on the inside.

A large section of the 7 m wide main street has been found, with shops lining it. The flagstones used at present comprise the original '4th century street.

The underpass which includes this impressive archaeological monument of national significance is an intersection of the centre of the town. The present day directions of the underpass exactly coincide with those of the ancient walls, the ancient North—South axis is identical with the direction of the walls and the towers and the East—West axis coincides with the main street of Serdica.

The eastern gateway of Serdica—Sredets is the starting points of tours of the archaeological sites of our capital. A small number of exhibits are on display in the underpass.

The Eastern Gateway and the Main Street



The North-east round corner tower is situated at the intersection between Iskar Street and Serdica Street. This part includes sections of the eastern and northern wall. Three premises serving the needs of the garrison are visible. The entrance to the tower faced the city. The walls have been preserved at a considerable height, the principal building periods are clearly discernable — the end of the 3rd century — opus mixtum, bricks and stone, towards the 5th century, a band of brick masonry, the last layer dates from the Second Bulgarian State, when the tower was transformed into a square one. Parts of the wall, up to 6 m wide have been preserved, together with stairs leading to the tower and a postern gate.

A small lapidarium has been set up in the grass nearby, including interesting architectural monuments, fragments of columns, architraves, cornices, inscriptions, tomb stones found in Sofia.

Northeast Round Tower (present day Serdica street and Iskar street)



Part of the wall and a triangular tower, built of bricks on a stone block foundation have been preserved in an underground chamber of the corner building of Boul G.Dimitrov and Exarch Josif Street.

The triangular tower has a small inner room and two side doors with stone slabs as thresholds. This tower was built towards the 5th century, when a brick band reinforced the wall. The triangular tower points to the North. Such a shape does not exist elsewhere and being located in the middle of the wall it becomes an important landmark.

Triangular tower (present day Boul. G.Dimitrov and Exarch Josif street, the cellar of the Sofia shop)



This is the largest and most interesting archaeological site of the capital. Situated between George Washington Street, Trapešitsa Street, and Kniaz Boris Street, the western gateway is located on the same axis with the eastern one and was linked to it through one of the main streets reaching the forum. Beyond the city walls these streets joined the two important roads passing through Serdica. The entrance and the gateway flanking it to the North have also been found. The gateway itself was built of large limestone blocks, the thresholds are made of slabs. This gateway was also closed with an iron covered portcullis. It was rebuilt several times between the 2d and the 14th century. The brick pentagonal tower, identical with the tower at the eastern gateway, had small posterns. During the Middle Ages a flight of stone steps was built here.

About 60 m of the western wall have been unearthed, running to the north, reaching an obtuse angle in the wall, defended in this location by a triangular tower.

A large building with spacious rooms found outside the walls, probably serving as a warehouse for the goods imported here and dating from the 4th century, survived up to the 5th century, when it must have been destroyed during one of the major invasions. Life beyond the city walls became insecure and the inhabitants withdrew behind them, because of the incessant raids during the 6th century.

A proteichisma with bastions for defence, a kind of curtain wall, was built some 20 m out of the wall itself in connection with the constant raids during the 6th century.

After the major rebuilding of the wall early in the 4th century, a wide street, covered with large stone blocks and rubble, was made along the inner side of the wall, linking the different quarters with the gateway. When the walled area became crowded, part of the street became the site of a prosperous house with a hypocaust (underground heating system). A large early Christian basilica from the 4th — 5th century was found to the east of the street.

These buildings were also rebuilt and covered for various purposes and also used when the city was included in the confines of the Bulgarian state (the early 9th century). Two dwellings from the time of the First Bulgarian state have been found, dug in the earth, with an original stove made of ancient architectural fragments. During the Middle ages barracks were added inside the wall.

It was here, between the two towers that the foundations of the wall were undermined during the three month siege by the Ottomans (1382). This was the last trial the ancient wall, which has defended Sofia for centuries, had to endure.



The Western Gateway (between the present day G.Washington street, Trapesitza street, and kniaz Boris I street)



The ruins of different periods from the 2d century to the 19th century National Revival have been found to the west of the largo, behind the monument of V.I.Lenin. Part of the western section of the fortifications, namely a round tower and stairs dating from the 4th — 5th centuries and built between the 12th and the 14th century; parts of ancient streets and buildings serving different purposes, a medieval church with fine murals.

A 50 m stretch of the wall was found, together with the brick band and part of a staircase made of opus mixtum. The round tower, rebuilt during the Second Bulgarian State, is lined with bricks on the outside. A secret entrance leading out of the tower was found dug out in the wall.

A broad ancient street leading in a north-south direction and a second perpendicular street, reaching the entrance of the round tower and the city forum were also found.

The ruins of three buildings, independent of each other dating from the 3rd — 4th century, were found to the east of the wall and within the confines of the city. The walls of one of them are preserved to a considerable height and it has a double entrance leading to the street. A dwelling was built on the site of a pagan temple with a large yard, surrounded with a covered portico. Ruins of public buildings with decorative elements, dating from the 12-13th century, together with a Christian basilica were also found. The Middle Ages also saw the construction of a fine church on this



The Archaeological Complex (under the present day site of the Bulgarian Foreign Trade Bank)

site, the church of St Spas — a one-nave church with entrances on both sides and faceted masonry. Three layers of murals from the 15th to the 18th centuries were preserved. The images of the earliest murals are drawn in a restrained and expressive manner. After the Bulgarian people won the right to an independent church and the right to build large churches St Spas was enlarged and redecorated in bright colours, reflecting the optimism of the times.

The image of st Georgi of Sofia, a goldsmith who refused to adopt Islam and was killed has been drawn in a niche next to the altar. A large medieval graveyard was found around the church.

II. ANTIQUITIES IN THE FORTIFIED PART OF THE TOWN

6

THE ROTUNDA ST GEORGE AND THE VICINITY

The most important open air archaeological complex in Sofia is in the inner court of the Balkan Hotel and consists of two exceptional buildings, divided by an ancient street.

The western building — the brick rotunda St George was unearthed fully during work on the hotel, and consists of an oval hall leading on to a cross-shaped hall with four niches, probably for a statue in each of them. Two arched entrances lead to a three-part narthex, liked with chambers on each side. Each has a narthex of its own and a nave ending in a semicircular apse to the east. The rotunda occupied only the eastern part of the building. It has a ceremonial hall with a diameter of 9.5 m and 14 m high. A high cylindrical drum supports the semi-spherical dome. Four deep symmetrical niches in the shape of a semi circle, a rectangular altar to the east, eight elongated windows and the main entrance on the western wall make up the interior. The arched entrance, of considerable height 3.20 m, finishes in a restrained cubic structure on the exterior.

The rotunda is the only building preserved in Bulgaria from the 4th century. It served for ceremonial occasions connected with the visits of the Emperor Constantine the Great in Serdica or as a martyrion, a cult building used to house the remains of Christian martyrs. During the mass baptism in early Christian times the rotunda served as a baptisterium. Towards the mid 5th century the building



The Rotunda St. George, 4th century

was destroyed, probably during invasions of the Huns, the rotunda being the only part to survive: it was later turned into a church. It is mentioned in Bulgarian historical sources for the first time in 1469 by Vladislav the Grammarian, who described the removal of the remains of St Ivan of Rila to the Rila Monastery. During the reign of sultan Selim I (1512-1520) the church was turned into a mosque, called *gyul Cami* and a minaret was erected at its Southwest corner.

The rotunda is famous for its unique murals, painted for the first time after it was built. It was decorated on three occasions during the Middle Ages (10th-14th centuries) and for the last time during the period of Ottoman rule (14th century).

Floral ornaments preserved in the North-west niche are examples of the art of the First Bulgarian State. The seven windows under the dome and 16 large figures of prophets reveal the development of mural painting between the 10th and the 11th century. Parts of the images of three of the prophets have been preserved. A monumental frieze of the large figures of eight angels with outspread wings and flying garments, divided in two groups appear here. The fine faces of the angels with expressive eyes can be seen. These murals date from the 10th century and are linked with the Golden period of Bulgarian culture.

During the 12th, when the city was under Byzantine rule, the



Head of an Angel from the Murals of the Rotunda St. George



rotunda was decorated beneath the windows. A broad frieze of 16 prophets, two in each field between the windows, has been preserved from that period. The images of a group of saints can be seen on the western wall, above the door, beneath the frieze. Separate compositions have been depicted in the upper parts of the niches and above the doors: evangelical scenes and the images of the four evangelists. The group of five saints-monks, presented above the entrance of the western wall is preserved best. All murals bear Greek inscriptions.

The entire church was redecorated during the 14th century during the period of the Second Bulgarian State. Christ Pantocrator was drawn in the centre of the Dome, surrounded by four angels and four evangelists. A monumental frieze of 22 standing figures of prophets, unsurpassed in their expressiveness has been preserved beneath the dome itself. A broad band with Slavonic letters separates the frieze from the figures in the dome. The third layer has the largest number of scenes: the Assumption, above the northern South entrance, the Ascension of Christ, above the North entrance, the Nativity, and the Purification of the Virgin Mary — in the Southwest niche, the Baptism, and the Transfiguration, in the Northwest niche, the Raising of Lazarus in the Northeast niche and the Annunciation, above the Triumphal Arch, leading to the altar. The images of the four evangelists John, Mathew, Luke and Mark are preserved above the four niches in the rotunda.

The building was decorated for the last time during the 16th century when the fine murals were plastered over by and the rotunda was painted with the traditional floral motifs in mosques, partially preserved.

The rotunda St George is the only monument in the Bulgarian lands with such a complex and long history, a vivid example of the development of Medieval Monumental Art. It is among the most famous monuments of Bulgarian and East European culture.

An ancient street, covered with large flagstones runs to the East of the rotunda St George. A deep drain, made of stones and mortar was found beneath it, with the clay pipes of the water supply system running parallel to it. Remains of buildings from late antiquity have been found on the other side of the street. A public building with an octagonal chamber and a three nave hall is of particular interest. The foundations of the columns which supported the dome are still visible at the corners of the octagon. Another three-nave chamber, with a hypocaust heating system, is situated next to it. The building was turned into a church with a semicircular apse facing the east.

Ruins of a medieval dwelling dating from the 13th-14th century, partially built on the pavement of the Roman street have been preserved in this archaeological complex. The identical structure with some churches in Nessebur and Turnovo, give ground to date it from the time of the Second Bulgarian State. A medieval well is also preserved here. A building from Ottoman time existed south of the Bulgarian medieval dwelling.

Intermingling and placed one over the other, the ruins in the court of the Balkan Hotel are a fine illustration of the complex history of Sofia.

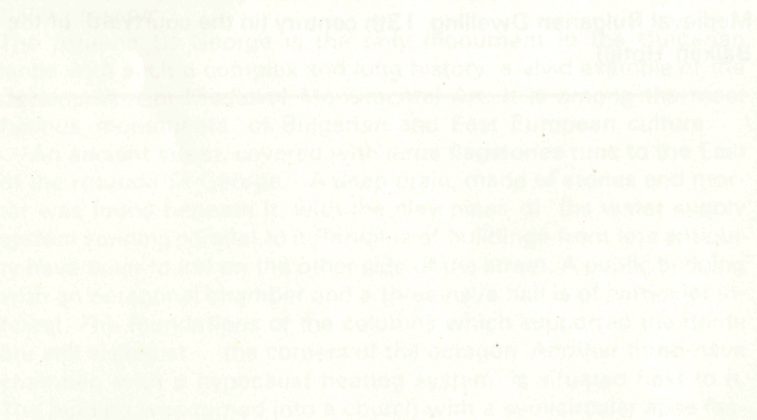


Medieval Bulgarian Dwelling, 13th century (in the courtyard of the Balkan Hotel)

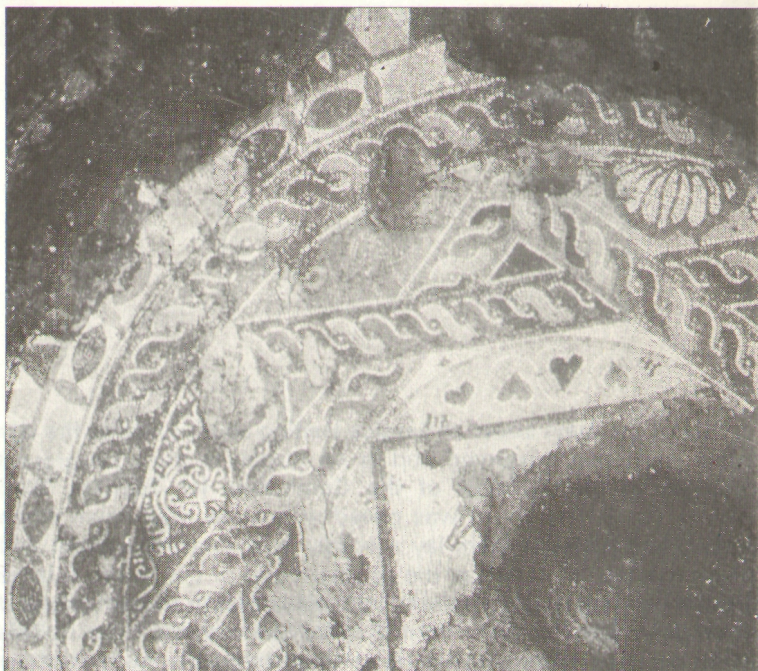


AN ANCIENT BULGARIAN BUILDING

Part of the large ancient rectangular building with an inner courtyard, located in the courtyard of the Balkan Hotel, is a medieval Bulgarian dwelling. The building is made of red brick and stone, with several arched openings. The courtyard is paved with large, irregular stone tiles, and there is a low brick wall on the left side. The building is located in the courtyard of the Balkan Hotel, which is a modern building with a glass facade. The dwelling is a good example of medieval Bulgarian architecture.



Part of the large ancient rectangular building with an inner court covering an area of 400 square metres surrounded by a portico, has been preserved on the ground floor of a building on Tsar Kaloyan Street No 8. Around it there were large rectangular chambers, antechambres, long corridors, round and octagonal chambers, all of them heated by a hypocaust. The floor was decorated with multicoloured mosaics and some of the walls, 1 m thick, must have supported a second floor. The round and octagonal chambers were covered with domes. The monumental character and the decorations of the building warrant the conclusion that this was the residence of a highly placed official. A mosaics of the small baths in an identical style, link them with the representative building. The whole architectural complex is supposed to have been the place of Constantine the Great in Serdica.



A Mosaic from a Public Building (the present day tsar Kaloyan street)

8

AN ANCIENT PUBLIC BUILDING

Thick high walls of a large public building, probably a basilica from the 3rd-4th century housing the Gerousia (the Council of Elders) of Serdica, have been preserved in the new building of the Committee for Culture, on Blvd Stamboliiski No 19. A monumental inscription in Greek on a granite block, containing the names of citizens of Serdica, supports the possibility of this function. The historical monument has been preserved in a special hall and is to be on display.

Part of the main street of Serdica leading south towards the city forum has been preserved and is on display in the underground chamber of the building of the Committee for Tourism, Blvd Vitosha No 1. The street was paved with large, well-hewn stone blocks, and beneath them lay a solidly built draining system and sewer leading to a shaft at the southern end of the street. A large brick-lined water supply system, with clay pipes in rows of two and three pipes leading away from it, have been found under it. This water supply system brought water caught from the foothills of the Vitosha mountain.

The 65 m street, running from East to West is adorned with porticoes. Its location indicated that this was the main street of Serdica during the 4th century.

Ancient Street Running in a North—South Direction (present day building of the Committee for Tourism — Boul. Vitosha N 1)



During recent construction work and rebuilding at the Covered Market in Sofia remnants of thermae from late antiquity have been unearthed. Two rectangular chambers, semicircular basins, covered with waterproof mortar, drains and a water supply system, as well as a hypocaust, dating from the 4th century, have been found. The baths in Serdica were famous in antiquity and were visited by emperors.

Coins Struck by Serdica Mint Depicting the Temple of Apollo
latros, 3rd century A.D.



One of the few medieval churches which have come down to our times, has been preserved in the underpass between the Central Department store and the Balkan Hotel. Built towards the end of the 14th century or the early 15th century, it was supported by the influential guild of saddle makers, hence its name, St Petka of the Saddle-makers („samar“ is the Bulgarian for saddle.) The church is a small one-nave building with a semi-cylindrical dome and a semicircular apse. It had a narthex at the western end and a rectangular chamber at the southern end, both destroyed at present. The church was made of hewn blocks and rounded stones, with the occasional use of hewn blocks from older buildings. Because of the well-balanced proportions of the interior, it gives the impression of a monumental building, regardless of its small size and low vault. The large semicircular conch in the apse and the lateral niches with semicircular arches break up the monotony of the wall and offer a rhythm of lines and shapes. The church is lit through three small windows in the vault. The floor was covered by hexagonally shaped bricks, preserved in some parts of the nave.

The murals belong to three different periods. Originally the entire church was decorated with murals during the 15th century. The second period is represented by the head of St Simon Stylites, depicted at the western end of the northern wall. The remains of the third period date from the 19th century. From an artistic point of



Mural from the Church of St. Petka Samardzhiska 15th century

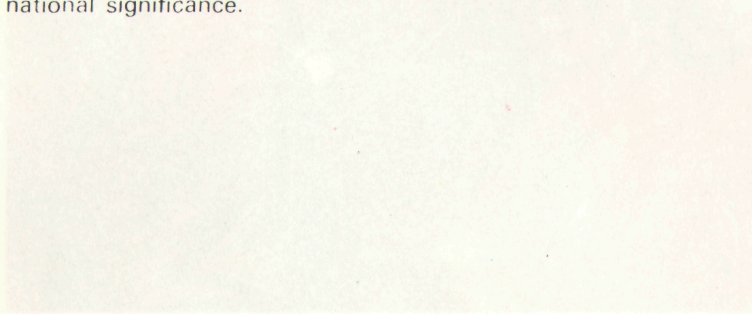
The Church St. Petka Samardziiska, 15 th century



view the old murals are the most valuable, presenting a large number of biblical scenes, images of fathers of the church, hermits, warrior saints, prophets, some of the images being in a good state of preservation. The artist had shown particular skill in his compositions and his work is in line with the best traditions of Bulgarian medieval art. Placed in small frames with the small figures painted in warm tints, the frescoes from the 15th century are reminiscent of easel painting. The scenes „The Flight from Egypt“, „The Presentation of Christ“, „The Presentation of the 12 Year Old Christ before the Wise Men“ „The Last Supper“ „The Washing of the feet“, etc. are of particular interest. The murals are done in two painting techniques: in oils and dry fresco.

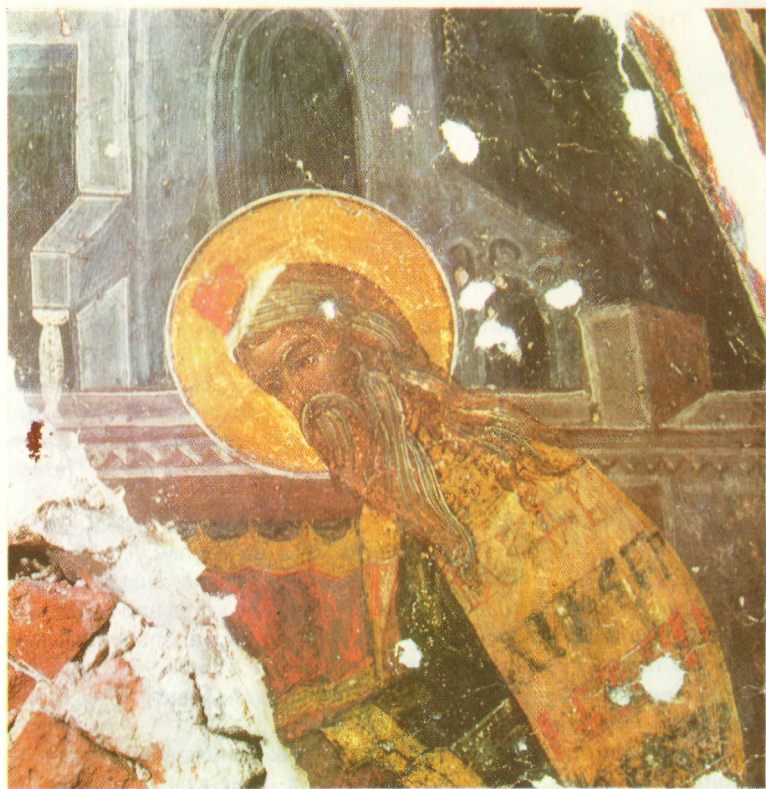
These remarkable murals are a witness of the high level of Bulgarian art and the active part played by Bulgarians during the first centuries of Ottoman rule.

The church of St Petka Samardjiiska is a listed monument of national significance.



Mural from the Church of St Petka Samardjiiska 15th century





Murals from the Church St.Petka Samardziiska, 15 th century



This mosque is situated on Blvd. G. Dimitrov — opposite the Mineral Baths in Sofia and the Central Covered Market. The inscription preserved on this mosque gives the construction date as the year 1576 and the name of the builder Hadji Imar Sinan — the famous architect, who also built the remarkable Sultan Selim mosque in Adrianopol. Its name is connected with a large Turkish building near the Baths.

A handsome portico was erected in front of the mosque with stone columns, supporting three lead covered domes. The interior is a cube shaped area with a semi-spherical dome, sustained and decorated in the exterior with semi-arches. The walls are decorated with finely drawn texts of the Koran. The mosque has a high and graceful minaret, mentioned by the Turkish traveler EvliaCelebi (17th century) as a minaret without equal among the many minarets in Sofia.

The Banya Basi mosque is one of the few monuments of oriental architecture still standing in Sofia and is used as a mosque.

The Banya Basi Mosque, 16th century



III. RUINS BEYOND THE CITY WALL

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BUYÜK MOSQUE (THE GREAT MOSQUE)

The Buyük Mosque (Kodja Mahmud Pasha's Mosque) is situated between Blvd. Stamboliiski, Blvd. Rouski, and Legué Street. Construction on this impressive building began during the reign of sultan Mehmed II (1451—1487) and the mosque was completed in 1496. Buyük Mosque is one of the most important monuments of Islamic architecture in Bulgaria. During the 17th century it is cited as the largest mosque in Sofia, as its name (The Great Mosque) indicates.

This square structure with sides measuring 36 m, is divided into 9 smaller squares, with four columns and their corresponding wall piers on the opposite walls. A dome covers each small square with those in the middle dominating over the rest.

The National Library was housed here after the Liberation. At present Buyük Mosque houses the National Archaeological Museum.

The Buyük Mosque is a listed historical building, an achievement of Medieval East European and Near Eastern architecture.



The Buyük Mosque, 15th century (present day National Archaeological Museum)



This remarkable monument of early Christian architecture in Serdica is situated in the northwest part of Alexander Nevski Square. Archaeological excavations were carried out here in 1910 — 1912 when the remains of two older churches were found on the site. The first one was built during the 4th century amid the largest early Christian necropolis of the town. An interesting mosaic, at present preserved in the Archaeological Museum covered the floor of the basilica. It was probably destroyed by the Visigoths towards the end of the 4th century.

The new church in its place was a three-nave basilica with a three part narthex. The new basilica was built over the existing tombs and part of the mosaics were preserved. Nevertheless this second basilica was also destroyed soon after its erection during the great invasion of the Huns in 447 A.D.

The present day basilica dates from the 5th century or the beginning of the 6th century and is linked with the period of the last flourishing of Serdica. The new basilica is a three-nave church covered with cruciform dome and a three-sided apse. The naves are divided by plastered columns with elongated arches. Originally the two-sided naves were two stories high and the central nave — three stories high, flanked by two four story towers, which housed the baptisterium and the belfry.

It was rebuilt during the Second Bulgarian State (12th — 14th



The Basílica St Sophia, 6th century A.D.

Mosaics from the First Church Under the Basilica St. Sophia, 4th-5th century A.D.



century) when St Sophia became the metropolitan's church with a seminary attached to it. Probably it was at that time that the church was decorated and some of the windows of the naves made smaller, while others were simply walled up. Prominent citizens were buried in the narthex, among them the boyars Vitomir and Hotor, whose gold rings were found during excavations here.

During the period of Ottoman rule the appearance of the basilica and the square changed. During the 16th century it was turned into a mosque. A minaret was erected in the Southwest corner and a set of adjoining buildings appeared: a caravanserai, a shrine for derwiches etc.

Between the 16th and 19th centuries many a traveller mentions the basilica pointing out with good reason that it was this basilica that gave the the city its name.

Abandoned during the decline in the Ottoman Empire, the basilica was badly damaged in two consecutive earthquakes in the 19th century. It was not restored until after the liberation of Bulgaria.

Archaeological excavations reveal the great importance of this unique monument on the Balkan peninsula.

The largest necropolis of the city was situated around the basilica St Sophia. Alongside sarcophaguses and vaults graves of commoners were found with two rows of tiles instead of tombstones. Exhibits found during the excavations of 3rd — 4th century graves around the site of Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, are displayed in the garden on the North side of the basilica.

Ancient Tombs to the North of the Basilica, 4th-5th century



An arched rectangular building with walls made of pebbles, pieces of brick and mortar, and an all-brick roof was found north of the Central House of the Peoples Army. This building had been erected in another rectangular area, facing west, with an entrance made of stone blocks. Solidly constructed, it is well preserved. The architecture of the structure and the building technique point to the 16th century as a probable date. This must have been a large ammunition depot or a prison attached to the barracks to the east of the town.

The arched building is a rare architectural monument of that period and is only one of its kind found in this century. It is soon to be open to the public.

The Arched Building, 16th century (behind the Central House of the Peoples Army)



On the cover: The Rotunda St George, 4th century

**The Ruins of the centre of Sofia
A guid-book**

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